Rhode Island's Diploma System:
An Overview

Rhode Island Department of Education

Explanation and Considerations for Use

The Rhode Island Diploma System Overview explains the main requirements and elements of the Rhode Island Diploma System and describes the function of school-wide assessments (exhibitions, graduation portfolios, and the CIM), in the overall diploma system. Be sure to read over the entire document before making decisions about the role of the exhibitions in your district's/school's diploma system. The overview also provides information on resources that will provide some support as your school/district designs and implements an exhibition system.

This is a guidance document issued by the Rhode Island Department of Education. Rhode Island schools should consider it carefully when designing an exhibition system.

RHODE ISLAND'S DIPLOMA SYSTEM
AN OVERVIEW
DECEMBER 15, 2004

BACKGROUND:

Rhode Island has embarked on one of the most ambitious secondary-school reform initiatives seen anywhere in the nation. Utilizing the opportunities to leverage change brought about by the Board of Regents' Regulations for High Schools (January 2003) and the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) (**ESEA 02 – January 2002**), Rhode Island has launched a comprehensive plan for addressing the critical issue facing the state's secondary schools (high schools and middle schools).

Rhode Island's process for graduating students from high school, as in many other states, relies on the accrual of Carnegie Units. Past reform efforts resulted in increasing the number of units a student must have upon graduation. We now know that this has not necessarily led to an increase in student learning. In fact, feedback from higher education, the business community, and students' test scores indicate that a high-school diploma does not consistently certify that a student is prepared to pursue further study, work, or other interests. Today's high-school graduates must have a strong literacy and numeracy foundation to be capable of problem-solving, decision-making, analytic reasoning, working with teams, effectively communicating and interpreting information, and demonstrating responsibility.

IN ORDER TO ALLOW STUDENTS MULTIPLE OPPORTUNITIES TO DEMONSTRATE PROFICIENCY, THE REGENTS' HIGH-SCHOOL REGULATIONS REQUIRE DISTRICTS TO DEVELOP A NEW HIGH-SCHOOL DIPLOMA SYSTEM CONSISTENT WITH THE COMMISSIONER'S CRITERIA, LISTED BELOW:

- **COURSE WORK** – AT LEAST 20 CARNEGIE UNITS THAT PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO LEARN AND BE ASSESSED AGAINST COMMONLY HELD EXPECTATIONS;

- **KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS** – THE CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AND HABITS OF THINKING, REASONING, COMMUNICATING, AND APPLYING KNOWLEDGE THAT REPRESENT THE MINIMUM STATEWIDE REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL STUDENTS;

- **SCHOOLWIDE DIPLOMA ASSESSMENTS** – ADDITIONAL MEASURES OF PROFICIENCY INCLUDING EXHIBITIONS, GRADUATION PORTFOLIOS, CERTIFICATES OF INITIAL MASTERY (CIM), ET AL., REQUIRED BY THE REGENTS' REGULATIONS FOR GRADUATION THAT ASSESS THE DEEP

CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AND EXPECTATIONS REPRESENTED BY IN-DEPTH, LONG-TERM STUDENT WORK;

✤ **LOCAL ASSESSMENTS** – CLASSROOM, SCHOOL DISTRICT TESTS, QUIZZES, COMMON ASSESSMENT TASKS, PROJECTS, AND OTHER LOCAL ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENTS; AND (Based on GSEs)

✤ **STATE ASSESSMENTS** – DERIVED FROM GRADE-SPAN EXPECTATIONS (GSEs) IN READING, WRITING, MATHEMATICS, AND SCIENCE.

The elements of this new diploma system are specifically designed to require teaching and learning experiences that call for students to apply their academic knowledge and skills in authentic, intellectually demanding ways. As Rhode Island transitions to this new Diploma System, student proficiency in a common academic core (English language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, the arts, and technology) will (can) be delivered through the existing course structure. However, the existing curriculum, instruction, and assessments that guide assignments, projects, and other learning experiences need to be redirected to explicitly align with the districts' PBGRs, the Grade- Span Expectations, and national content and performance standards.

This guide is designed to help districts make important connections among the state's secondary- school reform strategies and key policy expectations to ensure consistency across each community's diploma system. Likewise, the diploma system developed in each community will ultimately strengthen the secondary-school experience for all students. Readers should use this guide as a roadmap for developing their own district plan, describing in detail how secondary-school reform will be accomplished in their community.

The guidance issued earlier this year (5.0 – February 2004 – www.ridoe.net) outlined initial thinking on Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements (PBGRs). That guidance offered enough detail to engage schools in a series of discussions that allowed us to better understand ongoing efforts and to appreciate the magnitude of work it will take to implement our diploma system. A technical bulletin, which builds from the 5.0 PBGR guidance, will follow the release of this document (January 2005) and will provide more detailed information for implementing the Diploma System. All elements of the district Diploma System must be in place for the class of 2008 (by Regents' Regulations).

ELEMENTS OF THE DIPLOMA SYSTEM:

The Regents' Regulations for High Schools require that schools restructure their programs to focus on preparing all students to be ready for post secondary choices whether it be college, technical school, or the workplace by providing educational experiences for all students centered on a rigorous and relevant curriculum, which ultimately leads to the issuing of a diploma. Additionally, based on these regulations, it is also expected that secondary schools will implement standards-based curricula and develop appropriate supports for students, particularly in the areas of literacy and student personalization.

By May of 2004, each district was required to submit to the Commissioner of Education a detailed plan of how they were meeting the expectations of the Regents' Regulations for High Schools. The elements of that report reflect the key components of the Diploma System. It is expected that a combination of the following elements will provide students with the opportunities to demonstrate proficiency and provide evidence that all state and local requirements have been met.

ELEMENTS:

✍ **20 Credits (Carnegie Units)**

The requirements for graduation from a Rhode Island high school have been raised to include completing at least 20 Carnegie Units of study. Additionally, communities may not differentiate between the number of credits required to graduate for "college-bound" and non "college-bound" students. Course work, instructional strategies, and programs of study may vary; however, each course offered must be aligned with standards at the state (English language arts, mathematics and science) or district (social studies, arts, and technology) levels on some commonly held set of expectations or standards, which would prepare students for whatever field they decide to pursue after high school. In the case of English language arts and mathematics, course work must be based substantially on the Grade-Span Expectations (GSEs) released in draft form in the fall of 2004. Schools should "map" the GSE to the schools' learner outcomes derived from the NEASC process, which are based on Rhode Island's Common Core of Learning. Learner outcomes and course offerings should all be mapped to the GSEs, applied learning standards, and other appropriate content standards.

In creating a Diploma System, districts need to consider whether all students have access to both rigorous and relevant instruction so as to ensure fairness and equity. Likewise, schools must offer structures for students who need additional help. These supports include personal literacy plans, scaffolded literacy designs, or Individual Education Plans (IEPs). (See Personal Literacy Plan Guidance – November 2003 and Regents' Regulations Guidance 4.0 – November 2004 at www.ridoe.net)

Schools should review all their learner outcomes and ensure that Applied Learning standards are fully embedded into curriculum, instruction, and assessment in all courses in all areas. Course work that students engage in as they complete the 20 credits should help to prepare them for successfully demonstrating proficiency through the additional measures.

✍ **KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS:**

The second component of a district's diploma system includes additional measures of proficiency, which must be in place for all graduates of the class of 2008 (fall

2004 freshman class). Opportunities to learn and practice for the knowledge and skills that lead to proficiency should be integrated into every student's daily learning experiences every year, regardless of the methods of demonstration a school chooses (e.g., exhibition, portfolio, CIM, end of course exam). A school's PBGRs should ensure that every student has acquired the school's leaner outcomes as identified through the NEASC process.

The Regents' Regulations require that students demonstrate proficiency in six core areas (mathematics, English language arts, science, social studies, technology, and the arts) and have applied learning experiences embedded into all of their course work. (Review

Graduation by Proficiency 5.0 Guidance – February 2004 at www.ridoe.net). The Gates learning networks are currently focusing directly on this effort.

For the class of 2008, the PBGR component must include required demonstrations of proficiency in ELA and mathematics based on the grade 9 and 10 GSEs. The methods of demonstrating proficiency must be aligned with RIDE guidance on portfolios, exhibitions, and tasks currently being developed by the Gates Networks.

✍ **SCHOOLWIDE DIPLOMA ASSESSMENTS:**

Graduation Exhibition – An extended project that requires a student to simultaneously demonstrate mastery of knowledge and skills in a particular area. The exhibition draws on a personal academic focus of the student, explores a topic through in-depth research, represents the acquisition and use of knowledge in new ways, is completed individually, demonstrates one or more of the school's PBGRs, is presented to an external audience, has opportunities for revision, documents the process, and offers opportunities for reflection.

Graduation Portfolio – A collection of evidence that a student has the knowledge and skills expected of any graduate from that school. The portfolio is composed of a specific sub-set of student work (i.e., work from on-demand and extended tasks) and other evidence of his or her educational experiences tied to the school's learning expectations and the state's graduation-by-proficiency requirements. Students are expected to complete a written reflection on their portfolio evidence and to present their graduation portfolio to the school community.

Proficiency-based Departmental End-of-Course Exams – These offer a viable way to measure a student's proficiency, provided they are purposefully designed to include proficiency-based measures of performance. **Note:** A multiple-choice test, fill-in-the-blank, true-or-false, short-answer essay exam, by itself, is insufficient to honor the requirements of a proficiency-based, end-of-course exam. See Section 5.0 Guidance www.ridoe.net for more details.

Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) – Certificate of student accomplishment, awarded when performance is demonstrated, generally at or after age 16. The CIM reflects a standard of quality demonstrated through a real performance that is recorded, documented, and assessed. This documentation involves a combination of traditional tests, performance measures, collections of student work over time, and projects or exhibitions, and it is maintained in a portfolio. The main components of the CIM that is designed and implemented through the Rhode Island Skills Commission are: on-demand tasks, extended tasks, capstone projects, and the results of state assessments.

✎ LOCAL ASSESSMENTS:

Schools currently administer a variety of assessments (classroom, school district tests, quizzes, common assessment tasks, projects, and other assignments), which need to be aligned to their PBGRs and the GSEs. Schools should undertake a process to review the purpose of these local assignments to determine if they are aligned with the local GSEs and if they support their PBGR component through cross-content work and overall school-leaner outcomes.

✎ STATE ASSESSMENT:

A third element of the Diploma System for a district is the State Assessment, administered annually to every 11th grader (New Standards Reference Exam). Both state and federal law require these assessments. The current assessments are designed to measure the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE) proficiency standards. In the future, the State Assessment (2006) in English language arts and mathematics will be based on the Grade Span Expectations (GSEs), developed through the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP). Draft GSEs for grades 9-10 mathematics, reading, and writing are available. Mathematics GSEs for grades 11-12 will be developed by the summer of 2005. High-School Science GSEs are also being developed for grade 11, with testing to occur in the spring of 2008.

By regulation, RIDE's "on-demand" high-school assessment may count no more than 10% toward the evaluation of a student's diploma. However, the importance of the High-School State Assessment must be underscored. Districts are encouraged to use these results in conjunction with local assessment to form judgments about student achievement to make instructional-program adjustments based on these results. The K-16 dialogues currently underway will lead to state institutions of higher education learning more about interpreting the results of these assessments in making decisions about student admissions and placement.

Practically, this means that schools and districts must develop policies that describe how they will make decisions about whether or not a student has met an overall proficiency that suggests he or she is ready to graduate. For instance, class grades might count for 50%, a capstone project 10%, community service 10%, portfolio

entries 20% (at 5% a year) and, finally, state assessments 10%. Collectively this would add up to a 100% total judgment. All these pieces of evidence would create a body of evidence. A more detailed discussion of this topic will follow in the PBGR Technical Bulletin, to be released in January 2005.

RIDE assumes that the "on-demand" state-assessment results will be used in reviewing a student's "readiness" for graduation. Likewise, results on state assessments should modify individual student programs, which will address gaps in the student's learning.

Each school is responsible for administering its PBGRs within its overall Diploma System. Decisions about graduation should be made by weighing a complete body of evidence: Successful completion of at least 20 credits (districts may require more) of course work and evidence of proficiency in six (6) core areas provided through coursework and the PBGR component. For the classes of 2008 and 2009, the PBGR component must provide, at a minimum, evidence of proficiency in English language arts and mathematics as defined by the 9-10 GSEs and demonstrated through at least two of the following: portfolios, end-of-course exams, common-task requirements, or exhibitions. RIDE will determine the level of proficiency to be demonstrated through the GSEs (English language arts, mathematics, and science in 2010) and schools will determine the proficiencies required in social studies, arts, and technology, guided by appropriate standards-based content and defined levels of proficiency.

Schools must also attend to the literacy and personalization components of the High School Regulations to ensure that all students have multiple opportunities to learn and to demonstrate proficiency. RIDE provided specific guidance for "scaffolded literacy" (High School Regulations 4.0 – November 2003) and "personalization" (High School Regulations 6.0 – April 2004 – www.ridoe.net):

"Scaffolded Literacy" refers to each school's approach to a) school wide, cross-content literacy instruction for all students, b) targeted assistance for those students reading up to two years below grade level, and c) intensive services (PLPs) for those students reading more than two years below grade level. All middle schools and high schools must have a scaffolded-literacy program in place to ensure success for students in their coursework.

For all students to learn and achieve at high levels, secondary schools need to personalize learning and develop strategies through which every student can access Opportunities to Learn (see 6.0 Guidance – Regents' Regulations, April 2004). Research has shown that in effective schools, where "across-the-board" student achievement is high, the basics of a nurturing school climate and quality leadership are inherent in the school-improvement structures that have been created. Schools must determine which approach would best suit their structure and needs. For example, some schools are creating advisories while others are assigning students to coaches who help them assemble portfolios. There are many options beyond these two examples that ensure that all students are well-known and supported by the teachers in their high school.

The PBGR component of each district's Diploma System will be the focus of much activity as it is developed. As communities have selected their methods of authenticating proficiency (May 2004), the following timetable should be useful:

**PBGR IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE
FEBRUARY 2004 – FEBRUARY 2005**

February 2004	March - May 2004	April – June 2004	July – November 2004	December 2004	January 2005	February 2005
- Initial Guidance (5.0) for PBGR system issued by RIDE - (Regents' High-School Regulations Passed in January 2003) -------------- - Districts continue to implement High-School Regulations based on January 2003 Regents' Regulations	- PBGR/ Gates Advisory Committee meetings on-going -------------- Districts indicate PBGR elements that they have selected and sent to RIDE	- Initial work for Gates Networks and Statewide Sharing/Co-learning Opportunities ---------------- Districts continue their refinement of PBGR component for class of 2008	- Gates work continues and PBGR Steering Committee continues work -------------- - Districts begin work with class of 2008 students and designing their PBGR requirements	- RIDE disseminates Rhode Island Diploma System overview - RIDE meeting with districts on status of their Diploma System work for class of 2008 students	- RIDE hosts regional technical-assistance sessions with districts using PBGR/ GSE materials ---------------- - Districts meet with grade 9 students and parents to describe their PBGR system - RIDE PBGR Technical Assistance Bulletin disseminated	- RIDE hosts Technical-Assistance sessions using PBGR/GSE materials ------------- - Districts develop framework for their local PBGR criteria and quality standards based on RIDE guidelines issued in January 2005

Rhode Island Diploma System Local Assessment Toolkits
http://www.ride.ri.gov/highschoolreform/dslat/
October, 2005

PBGR IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE
FEBRUARY 2005 – JULY 2006

February 2005	March 2005	April – June 2005	July 2005 – July 2006
- Districts develop framework for their local PBGR component based on criteria and quality standards	- RIDE PBGR Peer- Review criteria draft disseminated districts and explained to districts	- Districts ensure class of 2008 students/ families are "on course" and aware of PBGR components - Schools ensure class of 2008 Opportunities to Learn are present - RIDE visits high schools to review progress - Finalization of grade 9-10 GSEs ELA/Math (Regents' Adoption)	- Practice Peer Review Process and Criteria - Districts may submit their Graduation Requirements and Diploma System to Commissioner/RIDE for early review and feedback

PBGR IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE
JULY 2006 – JULY 2012

July 2007	July 2008	July 2009	July 2010	July 2011	July 2012
- Diploma-System and PBGR Peer Review in ELA/Math for all districts completed	- Diploma-System and PBGR Peer Review in science - Districts submit entire Diploma System to RIDE	- Diploma-System and PBGR Peer Review in social studies, arts, and technology	- Diploma, System and PBGR Peer Review in English language arts, math, science	- Comprehensive Diploma-System and PBGR Peer Review for half of districts	- Comprehensive Diploma-System and PBGR Peer Review for remaining half of districts

		PBGR EMPHASIS CLASS OF:		
2008	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**
ELA, Math	ELA, Math	ELA, Math, Science	ELA, Math, Science, Arts, Technology, Social Studies	All Areas

✍ **Note:** The class of 2008 must be proficient in ELA and mathematics based on its district's PBGR component. Demonstration of proficiency must coincide with the proficiency descriptions defined by RIDE. The other four areas will be locally determined but generally focused on descriptions offered in the 5.0 guidance
(February 2004) in arts and technology and description in social studies and science
from the Technical Assistance Bulletin, to be published in January 2005.

✍ **Note:** In the years 2013 and 2014, all high schools in Rhode Island will have added fully endorsed PBGR components to their Diploma System, which will also meet the federal NCLB criteria for ensuring that <u>all</u> students (100 percent) are proficient in English language arts, mathematics, and science by 2014).